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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2734  
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3125  
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SUBJECT: Christian Missionary Foundation Opens New American  
University in Kyrgyzstan

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Mercy Christian Foundation, a legally registered Christian organization active in the northern Kyrgyz city of Tokmok, has partnered with some of the original founders of the American University of Central Asia and has opened an American Professional Institute in the city. With an entry class of 42 students, the directors of the institute have big plans for the future, but also have difficulty articulating the role the institute will play in the local higher education sector. End Summary.

An Ambitious Beginning with an Unexpected Partner  
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¶2. (SBU) The Mercy Charitable Christian Foundation, a legally registered religious organization, has been very active in the northern Kyrgyz city of Tokmok since 2001. Over the years, this foundation has opened seven primary schools around the city, currently teaching over 1,000 students. This group has also built Western-standard playgrounds with adjoining "Jesus Houses" in Tokmok and Kara-Balta. The foundation appears to have close and cordial relations with city authorities.

¶3. (SBU) In 2008, the foundation decided to expand its work into the higher education field. Working in partnership with two founders of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) no longer associated with the University, the foundation quickly secured the appropriate permissions from the Ministry of Education and renovated and equipped a small campus complex in Tokmok. The first class entering the Institute consisted of 42 students, primarily from the area around Tokmok. Only a minority of the incoming students are graduates of the Institute's primary and secondary schools.

¶4. (SBU) One of the foundation's key partners is Camilla Sharshikeeva, former Minister of Education and former Vice President of AUCA. Sharshikeeva said that the intent of the foundation is to establish an institution in the mold of U.S. land-grant universities with a focus on agriculture and business training. The institution is called American because of its use of the credit system and its use of English language training. Sharshikeeva says that even

though the institution was founded by the Christian foundation, training at the school is entirely secular and expressed no concerns over working with a Christian missionary organization. She said she hopes that even larger branches of the school will be opened in other educationally under-served regions in Kyrgyzstan.

Comment: Future Path Unclear  
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15. (SBU) While Foundation directors and school administrators are unanimously enthusiastic about embracing the United States (the U.S. flag flies over the school, the Rector has a locally-produced Great Seal hanging on his wall, and PAS staff are regularly invited to speak at even the most obscure university events), no common thread has emerged about the future of the institute. As best we can tell, this Institute has been funded almost entirely by the Christian Foundation. The Institute has not received any U.S. Government money, and the Embassy was not involved in the planning stages of the institute. There is a great need in Kyrgyzstan for technical education, particularly in agriculture and business administration. It is less clear why this education for rural farmers should be in English.

16. (SBU) Clearly this foundation and this institution have supporters. The grand opening was presided over by former Minister of Education and current head of the State Agency for Religious Affairs Osmonaliev, and the year-old institution already has its full attestation from the Ministry of Education (a feat AUCA has yet to fully accomplish). However, anecdotal reports indicate that the institute's curriculum is not as secular as administrators claim, and it will be interesting to see how the institute and the foundation will be affected by the new Law on Religion.

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